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Coaching Methods Not for the Classroom - NCAA and Reform Again

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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March Madness is long gone but College Basketball is still in the news and madness is still in the air. Robert Knight, tenured professor of basketball at Indiana University, has once again come under a cloud as questions have arisen about his teaching methods and his memory.

Accused of choking one of his players during a practice session in his classroom Professor Knight, a.k.a. "The General," denied that such a thing took place. When a videotape appeared showing the incident Professor Knight went fishing and left the discussion of teaching methods to a two-man panel of Indiana University trustees who have been charged with investigating Professor Knight's classroom techniques.

One would think that the videotape might be regarded as a smoking gun, but the trustees seemed unimpressed by this evidence. Apparently they have not yet determined whether the hand at the end of Professor Knight's arm which was choking the player was being directed by the professor or whether "it acted alone."

I have often thought about adopting the teaching techniques of college coaches in my own classroom where students sometimes need a little motivational assistance to learn. If I were to do so, Professor Knight would be my role model. Certainly if I threw a chair across the classroom it would get the attention of the students and help them concentrate on the issues at hand. Clearly if I shouted and screamed at them and questioned their connections to the human family it would motivate them to "think historically." Failing that if I dropped my pants and waved soiled toilet paper in front of them it should improve their overall test scores. Or in dealing with a particularly dense student, a head butt might work wonders.

All of these methods have been "reality tested" in Professor Knight's classroom. I have been a little hesitant to use these methods for fear that I could face a class action law suit from my students, or that administrators might not understand these basics of teaching effectiveness. What I am hoping is that all these methods will be sanctioned by Indiana University and its Trustees. With that kind of backing it will be easy to demand 110%

from my students, and they will all leave my classroom having learned more history while having in their possession a number of important real life lessons.

While Indiana University moves on with their investigation the NCAA has acted to address the cesspool of summer basketball. Summer basketball camps sponsored by shoe companies have become a key element in the college basketball recruiting process. It has also been a center for quasi-agent activity in which so-called "street agents" and "summer coaches" put their hooks into high school players and "advise" them on their choice of colleges. It also serves as an important contact point in identifying future shoe endorsers.

One of the summer coaches was recently identified by Dan Wetzel and Don Yaeger in their new book, Sole Influence: Basketball, Corporate Greed, and the Corruption of America's Youth as someone who has done time for selling crack cocaine and shooting a Kansas City police officer. This coach was free to operate in the AAU and Nike sponsored summer program. He has recently been indicted for paying out several thousands of dollars to high school basketball players. Oh these wonderful role models.

This week the NCAA Division I board of directors unanimously approved a package of basketball rules changes including a proposal to eliminate men's summer recruiting in 2002.

"The board is eliminating summer basketball environments as we now know it," said Penn State President Graham Spanier, chairman of the board of directors. "We will scale back in 2001, then we will replace it in 2002." Spanier said the new program is designed to reduce "the unsavory influences affecting the lives of young people and the integrity of our programs."

Two questions emerge from these decisions. First, in the multi-million dollar world of college basketball will such changes have any real impact other than producing a search for new avenues of influence and new loopholes in regulations? And second, if this is such a serious problem and indeed involves "unsavory influences affecting the lives of young people and the integrity of our programs," why is the NCAA waiting for two more years to phase in the reforms? If this is what is truly at stake, two more years

of corruption should not be allowed to go on before the stables are cleaned.

So one must wonder if what is really the concern by the NCAA is the early exit of star players for the professional game. Since 1996 an average of forty-two underclassmen a year have left college for the NBA. This in turn has put more pressure on coaches in the recruiting process and is a definite investment loss for colleges that spend vast amounts of money to produce a "quality entertainment product" for television and the public. This may be more a bottom line issue than a corruption issue.

The thin veil of the claim that these recruits are "student athletes" is once again exposed. No matter. Few believe this is any longer an issue within the multi-million dollar world of college basketball, television revenues, shoe sales, street agents, gamblers, and of course Professors of Basketball who teach the lessons of life.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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